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EPA Allows Highly Toxic Weedkiller on Food Crops — But Not Golf Courses

Concerns about the safety of paraquat, a highly toxic herbicide, pushed the EPA in 2021 to ban its use on golf courses — but the EPA still allows the weedkiller to be sprayed on almonds, walnuts, alfalfa and other crops.

By Common Dreams

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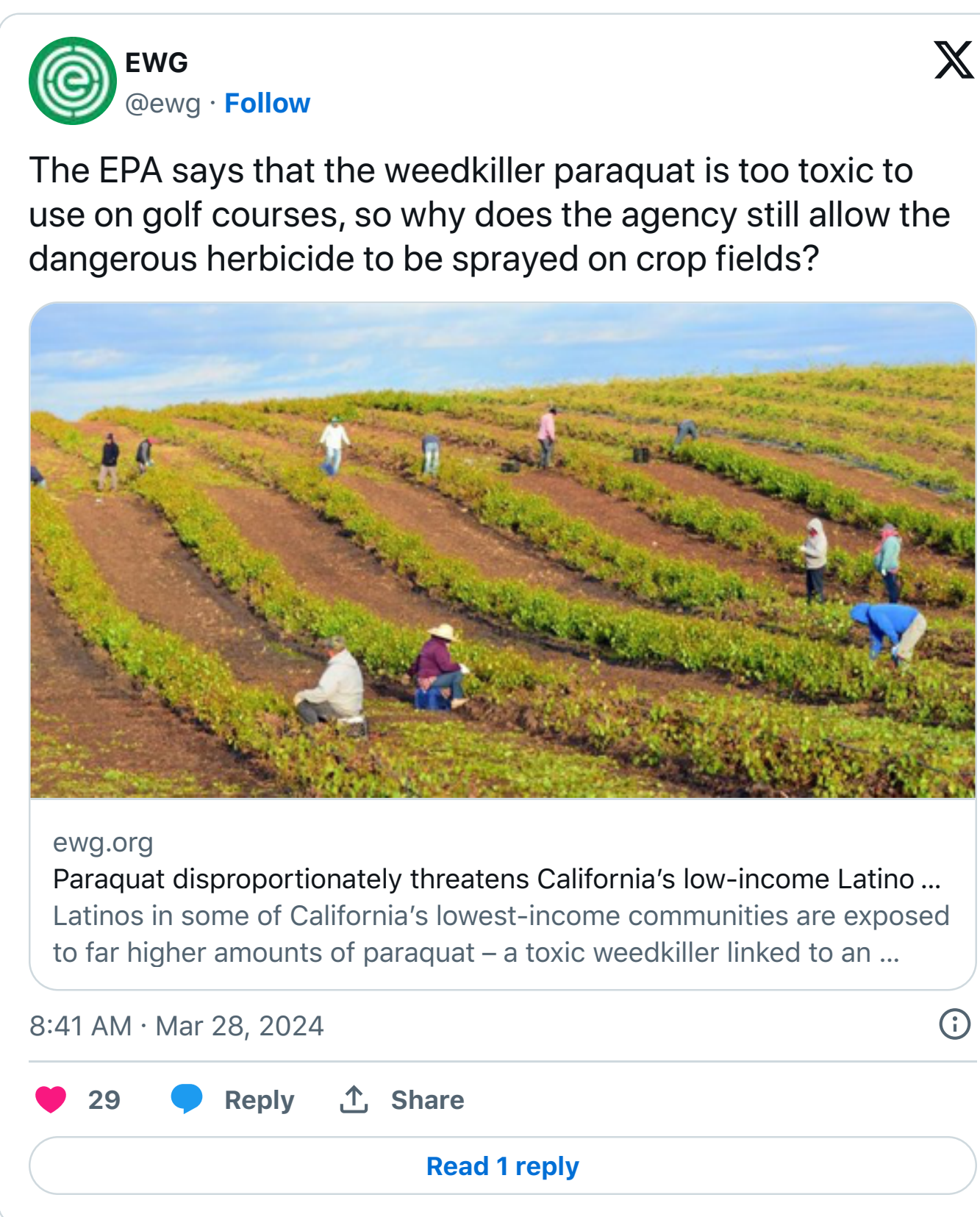
By Julia Conley

Concerns about the safety of paraquat, a highly toxic herbicide, pushed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2021 to ban its use on golf courses — but the weedkiller is still permitted for agricultural use, and a new first-of-its-kind analysis shows how the EPA's continued approval of the substance has put low-income Latino communities at disproportionate risk for health impacts.

The Environmental Working Group (EWG) found in the study released on March 27 that 5.3 million pounds of paraquat were sprayed over a five-year period in California, the only state with readily available figures on the herbicide.

Most of the weedkiller's use was concentrated in central counties where farms produce almonds, walnuts, alfalfa and other crops — and where Latino people make up about 75% of the population and nearly the entire farm labor force.

Ninety-six percent of farmworkers in the state are Latino, and 90% of people in the agricultural workforce were born outside of the U.S., making immigrants who often work for low wages among the people who are most affected by continued use of paraquat on farms.


EWG
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The EPA says that the weedkiller paraquat is too toxic to use on golf courses, so why does the agency still allow the dangerous herbicide to be sprayed on crop fields?

ewg.org
Paraquat disproportionately threatens California's low-income Latino ...
Latinos in some of California's lowest-income communities are exposed to far higher amounts of paraquat – a toxic weedkiller linked to an ...

8:41 AM · Mar 28, 2024

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The ingestion of a single teaspoon of paraquat is considered deadly, which has led 60 countries to ban the chemical while the EPA released an analysis in January concluding that its health risks were outweighed by the economic benefits of using paraquat.

The weedkiller has been linked to non-Hodgkin lymphoma, respiratory damage, kidney disease and childhood leukemia.

Al Rabine, an analyst for EWG who authored the report, said the EPA has also ignored a "mountain of evidence" that paraquat causes Parkinson's disease.

An epidemiological study of central California found that people living within a third of a mile of where paraquat is sprayed are twice as likely to develop Parkinson's.

"Paraquat is not only a threat to our environment but also a direct danger to the health and well-being of these communities, particularly Latino populations, who make up the majority of the population," said Rabine.

Rabine continued:

> "The findings of our analysis underscore the urgent need for action by the state to protect these communities from the harmful effects of exposure to this toxic weedkiller."

Between 2017-2021, EWG found, about 80% of the paraquat used on California crops was sprayed within Latino-majority census tracts. The group identified Kern County and the towns of Shafter and Wasco as "hot spots" for paraquat use.

"These three communities combined have over 80% Latino residents who witnessed almost 180,000 pounds of paraquat spraying during that time period," the group said.

In Kern County, which has a poverty rate of nearly 30%, EWG found that 1.2 million pounds of the herbicide were sprayed over roughly 1,200 square miles of farmland — threatening not only laborers who completed the work but also farmworkers who live in the surrounding communities, as paraquat can remain in soil and travel through the air — as well as coming home with workers on their clothing and potentially exposing their families.

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EWG identified five "fatal flaws" in the analysis the EPA has used to defend its continued approval of paraquat for farming, including:

- Ignoring new evidence about the potential health impacts of paraquat that has come out of legal action against its manufacturer, the Switzerland-based and Chinese-owned Syngenta.
- Ignoring the fact that paraquat use is largely concentrated in specific communities inhabited largely by low-income Latino farmworkers.
- Excluding from its safety analysis paraquat applications can drift through the air, especially on windy days.
- Failing to consider the health and environmental costs to farm owners, workers and people who live near farmland.
- Dismissing a growing body of research linking paraquat to Parkinson's, including 90 articles of evidence and "cutting edge studies" submitted by the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research.

EWG called on the EPA to follow the lead of dozens of countries that have banned paraquat — but warned that states must not wait for the federal government to take action.

"Federal pesticide law sets a floor, not a ceiling — states can choose to restrict a chemical, even without an EPA ban," wrote EWG government affairs manager Geoff Horsfield and toxicologist Alexis Temkin.

"To protect their residents and public health, state and local governments should exercise their power to ban paraquat."

Immigrant communities across central California, Horsfield said, "should not be subjected to additional health risks due to the negligent actions of pesticide manufacturers, farm owners, and state regulatory agencies."

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Julia Conley is a staff writer for Common Dreams.

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Beatrice
16 days ago
My gosh, this herbicide never goes away. I remember in the 70's, pot smokers worried about their stash being contaminated with Paraquat and I thought they banned it but it was only categorized as a restricted use weed control which basically means that it's not an over the counter weed control and that certified applicators can purchase it and use it as they will without enforcement.

I'm not surprised that the immigrant communities are the most vulnerable. There isn't any concern for native born American citizens much less, immigrants.
But most golfers are wealthy and live in gated communities that include a course. No wonder these chemicals are not allowed on courses.

8 0 Reply

CastleConnell → Beatrice
16 days ago
Why would they need to put it on a golf course though. Regardless, health is for the wealthy at this point. The wealthy can afford high protein, organic, spa cuisine. The poor are stuck with simple carbs and foods that are coated with chemicals.

4 0 Reply

Beatrice → CastleConnell
15 days ago edited
Yep, the rich get the best but they are also getting poisoned and don't care. What matters to them is that the course is beautiful, green and clean. Golf course maintenance is HIGH maintenance because they must be kept pristine. No gumballs are allowed to land on their precious turf. They use herbicides on a golf course to control the weeds and brush around the course. They also spray for ticks, etc... Ever seen an ugly golf course? I've had friends who worked on these golf courses and they nit pick every little detail all day long, seven days a week. The courses are spotless, the cups are changed and always clean, the turf is perfectly green from tons of nitrogen, etc... Cities love courses being built because they can raise taxes on everyone. Trump loves them because they make him super wealthy. What really pisses me off is that golf courses really destroy the environment and poison everything and G-d forbid geese or other animals get on the course, they get poisoned and killed. I think it was last year that a course that was being constructed in CA and because of the plandemic, it got delayed and people's dogs were getting poisoned by something on it.

There is a course in my area located on a naval weapons station and the course was built over tons of deadly toxins. Many of the employees have gotten cancers from working there but nothing changes because it's more dangerous to clean up the toxins than to let them leach into the soil over the next two hundred years. Here's a good article:
https://www.conserve-energy...

2 0 Reply

OliveTree → Beatrice
8 days ago
Golf courses are heavily sprayed with herbicides. How do you think they maintain the monocrop grass without weeds? Stay away from golf courses too.

0 0 Reply

Jon
16 days ago
Then likely it gets into our food as well! I use a lot of almond milk and now am worried. Followup please! Is it still being used or in the past only? I didn't see a timeline.

7 0 Reply

CastleConnell → Jon
16 days ago
I am thinking the same.

1 0 Reply

holisticpoet → Jon
16 days ago
I was a commercial onion grower and have used paraquat in the past and had concerns about its toxicity forty years ago. It is mainly a defoliant, which means it dries the foliage of plants. I asked the cooperative extension agent about residues on the onion crop when I heard that some farmers were using it to dry the onion tops so they could be harvested sooner, he explained to me that paraquat broke down extremely rapidly.

This extension agent was one of the best of the best and traveled around the US and Canada gleaning any information he could to help the farming industry. He informed me that after two days they could find no trace of paraquat on anything it was sprayed on. He also informed me that it was extremely toxic when fresh.

1 0 Reply

Peter van der Stam → holisticpoet
16 days ago
Do I really have to believe this.
Here in New Zealand they use 1080 to kill Possums. Of course the chemical industry says, It does NOT harm> ???? how come possums die from it ????
The scavenger birds (Harrier and falcon etc) have a big problem of infertility. How come?? if it is not harmful.

6 0 Reply

Beatrice → Peter van der Stam
15 days ago
And look what they are doing to poison the Dingos in Australia. Other animals will die as a result. Sickening.

3 0 Reply

Beatrice → Peter van der Stam
15 days ago edited
Read Silent Spring by Rachel Carson. G-d bless that woman. When I was in college I spent a year researching Ospreys because they had almost been wiped out by DDT. Poisons like that not only cause egg shell thinning and death but it altered their behavior because most animals know when they are not healthy enough to rear their young and will destroy them or in the case of the Osprey, the chicks will destroy each other which is what I researched. Fortunately, at the time I was researching, they had made a come back, though not as strong as they are today. The chemical companies wanted to blame the decline on the lack of Menhaden fish due to over fishing which is their main food staple and there was a huge debate about that. Depending on which industry one works for will determine their opinion about anything environmental which is why I don't trust any of the authorities.

I'm very concerned that industry will return to using DDT due to the fear mongering of mosquito born illnesses with the added benefit of depopulating humans and wildlife and domestic pets.

2 0 Reply

Beatrice → holisticpoet
15 days ago
They also say the same thing about glyphosate. In fact, it was my local extension agent that told me that Roundup was 'organic' and was safe enough to drink. Monsanto used that very line in their marketing. I have never trusted an extension agent to advise me on any chemicals because they were educated by schools that accepted funding from big ag. I do however, use their services for soil testing and other horticulture issues.

3 0 Reply

Sandburners → holisticpoet
15 days ago
Key words: "to help the farming industry". So he is biased for farmers, who want to use paraquat.

1 0 Reply

CastleConnell → holisticpoet
16 days ago
So why is it a health hazard then?

1 0 Reply

JoJo
10 days ago
Paraquat is only one of many Herbicides. I wrote an Op-ed on Herbicides a few weeks ago (https://www.trialsitenews.c..., and there are many bad actors from which to choose. Adding on Pesticides, Fungicides, etc. only exacerbates the problem.

1 0 Reply

Michael Jackson
15 days ago
I remember when gov was spaying that on cannabis fields back in the 70s, mainly in Mexico. When the public found out, all hell was raised, and they had to quit. I see they are back at it today.

1 0 Reply

CAWS → Michael Jackson
10 days ago
Um I had an ex marine living at my house in the 90s whose job it was to fly down to Mexico and service the planes the govt was using to spray drug fields. He said the cartels raided them several times and it was dangerous duty.

0 0 Reply

CAWS
10 days ago
When I was a child in the 50s on Cape Cod they were spraying lead arsenate from planes to kill the Gypsy moth. I had MEE's lines in all my fingernails [diagnostic for arsenic poisoning though doctor was unaware] . Five years later they switched to DDT . The lead arsenate was not actually banned till 2016 and golf courses were allowed to stockpile it. Cotton fields are still full of it. It remains in the soil and is taken up by plants; especially leafy ones.
I laughed when the city offered an old cotton field for a community garden and they would provide city water [fluoride & chloramine no thanks]. My dentist who had to be IV chelated twice in forty years of practice for Hg poisoning had quantitative testing that also showed high levels of lead & arsenic. He was not happy when I told him it came from his beloved golf course.

0 0 Reply

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